

A brief history of the University of Szeged and its predecessors

“The intellectual power of teachers creates the good reputation and blessed operation of a university, not its silent walls.”

(Áron Berde, November 10, 1872)

The era of the Jesuit Academy in Cluj

The beginning of higher education in Cluj, exiled to Szeged in 1921, dates back to 1581. István Báthory, Prince of Transylvania and King of Poland, on May 12, 1581 issued a foundation letter in Vilnius, taking measures to establish a Catholic university consisting of two faculties (Arts and Theology), within the framework of the Jesuit Collegium in Cluj which had been founded in 1579. The Jesuit Order sent 20 to 30 well-renowned excellent professors to Cluj (e.g. Jakub Wujek, István Szántó, Alphonso Carillo, Petrus Maiorius). The foundation letter of the Prince provided five villages and five larger ecclesiastical buildings (the Benedictine Abbey in Mănăştur, and the Franciscan and Clarist monasteries in Cluj) in Kolozs county for the development of the institution. At the end of the 16th century the Academy in Cluj was the sole higher educational institution in the Carpathian basin

In 1603, amidst the Long War (1591-1606) and religious upheavals, the Abby was demolished and two years later the Jesuit order was expelled from Transylvania. In 1616, Prince Gábor Bethlen allowed, however, for the Jesuits to open a school in Mănăştur which was namely a middle school but there was a teacher (Gergely Vásárhelyi) who, having been teaching at the University founded by Báthory, ensured a certain personal continuity between the two institutions. After 1660, the school in Mănăştur moved to Cluj and in 1698 the faculties of Arts and Theology opened again. In 1701, a *collegium*, named after Saint Joseph, especially catering to a less well-to-do student population, was opened. In 1733, commemorating the founding Prince and István Apor, the Transylvanian nobleman donating to the Academy, it was renamed Báthory–Apor Seminar. The 18th century was marked by unfettered development. For example, in 1773, eight professors were involved in teaching. From 1737, the author of the first Hungarian Algebra book, Mihály Lipsicz was in charge of teaching Mathematics, and, between 1752 and 1755, Miksa Hell was one of the instructors.

The era of the Piarist Academy in Cluj

In 1773, Pope Clement XIV suppressed the Jesuit Order. From 1773 to 1776, the Academy in Cluj carried on as a state institute under the name of Collegium Theresianum. The Law School was established and Theology was fortified by the moving of the Roman Catholic Seminary of Alba Iulia to Cluj. In order to promote the training of doctors, the departments of surgery and obstetrics were founded. The Academy in Cluj had, by then, been able to offer the full academic spectrum of classical universities.

From 1776 on, with the king's approval, the Piarist order took control over the Academy in Cluj and they expanded the academic curriculum with science subjects. That is when they started teaching chemistry, applied mathematics, cartography, civil engineering and medical sciences, like anatomy, psychology or pathology. In 1784, Joseph II downgraded the academy to a secondary school, a *lyceum*, and transferred the School of Theology to Alba Iulia. This move left Cluj with faculties of Arts, Law and Medicine. All three shared a preparatory nature as students were obliged to finish their studies at other, real universities even though the quality of the education was rising steadily. By the end of the 18th century, nine departments operated within the Faculty of Arts, and sciences also had a strong presence. The Law School set out with two departments; by 1816 there were nine. The Medical School started in 1775 with one single department and by 1838 there were seven departments carrying out research and teaching students. Due to massive development efforts, Cluj had the most students among the educational institutions of Transylvania. In the 1840s, around 330 students attended the school yearly.

There are no reports of ethnic disturbances between students before 1848 but we do have reports about the religion of 71% of students: 16% Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox (most of them were probably of Romanian origin), 5% Lutheran (most of them are likely to be Saxons) and 79% Roman Catholic, Calvinist or Unitarian (most of them were presumably Hungarian). The Lyceum also played a very important role in the formation of the Romanian intellectuals of Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania as a majority of the most important political, civil and ecclesiastical personalities studied here.

During the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848, there were plans to develop the lyceum into a university. Then Minister of Culture, József Eötvös was already contemplating potential candidates for academic positions but the defeat of the Freedom fight ended the great plans. In 1850, the Law School was closed (it could only reopen its gates in 1863), so from that time on, only medical training was available.

The University of Cluj

It was the consolidation created by the historical Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 that provided an opportunity to revive the plans for founding a university in Cluj. On May 29, 1872, King Francis Joseph allowed Tivadar Pauler, Minister of Education, to propose a bill to establish the university and charged him with launching the call for teachers and finding the location of appropriate buildings. On November 10, 1872, 258 students registered for the first semester in one of the four faculties of the university of Cluj. In Hungary, a unique feature of the university was to include independent faculties of Mathematics and Science. The first Rector, Áron Berde mentioned in his inaugural speech that “the university’s double mission is to develop and spread science through training academic people and to introduce scientific achievements in society: to build a country of science and improve practical life.” The high number of science departments encouraged all faculties of the university, laying the foundations for a great heritage of the Cluj period of the university: the focus on practical matters and the urge to reach the highest possible value in everyday life applications of scientific discoveries.

The university started its operations in 1872 in narrow, poorly equipped, impractical buildings. The following decades saw the construction of modern buildings for the Departments of chemistry, anatomy, physiology, and pathology. The construction of the impressive Main building took place between 1893 and 1902, while the central university library was built between 1906 and 1907. A whole variety of clinical buildings were also erected: surgery, internal medicine, obstetrics-gynecology, ophthalmology, dermatology and venerology, and neurology and psychiatry. With this potential, both the scientific achievements of the staff and the size of the student body grew increasingly, so, by 1914, it had become a mid-size (2,600-2,800 students), internationally well-respected school. Around sixty professors worked there, of which at least two dozen were members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

In the First World War the university suffered enormous losses; the developments stopped, the students, the academic staff and personnel were drafted (3,661 of them were involved in fights and 225 lost their lives), and the university buildings functioned as military hospitals. > By the autumn of 1918, Austria-Hungary lost the war and the territory of Transylvania had been occupied by Romanian forces. The Romanian army took Cluj on December 24, 1918 while the university carried on with teaching. The staff didn’t pledge allegiance to the Romanians in absence of a peace treaty, so, on May 12, 1919, the professors were forcibly removed from the buildings of the university and most were removed even from Transylvania.

Relocation to Szeged and the first decades there

The banished professors and students first went to Budapest where through cooperation with the Erzsébet University banished, in turn, from Bratislava, they continued working in the building of the Teacher Training College (Paedagogium) in Buda, using the library and laboratories of the University of Budapest. Since the autumn of 1919, the city of Szeged had signaled several times her wish to accommodate the university of Cluj temporarily. In the summer of 1921, the Hungarian parliament passed a law stating that the university of Cluj would temporarily continue its mission in Szeged. (The university used the word “Cluj” in its name for years, making sure that the Cluj origins were quite obvious.) The first official school year in Szeged was opened on October 9, 1921, and, as both professors and students had come from Cluj, they celebrated the 50th anniversary of the university in 1922.

Not unlike during the beginnings in 1872 in Cluj, the circumstances in Szeged were quite bleak at first for the university. The main building on Dugonics Sq. was rented from the Court of Appeals, and many secondary school buildings were also used by the university. The medical departments were placed in the municipal hospital and in the senior trade school. One of the major hindrances was, for example, that no student residences could function in the first year for the students, and, until 1924, they had no access to a university library. Students and professors could use their own books and those of the municipal library since all the books had to be left behind in 1919 in Cluj, where, by then, the university library had become the third largest in the country. The Eötvös Loránd Student Residence, which opened in 1930, was instrumental in helping the academic work of the university of Szeged. Following the example in Budapest, it became a center for elite education. Beside their regular university workload the residents here carried out considerable individual research work and followed special training courses.

In 1926, the university received considerable support from Count Kuno Klebelsberg, Minister of Education and the city of Szeged. This was the period when the modern medical buildings were built on the bank of River Tisza, when the modern edifices of the Medical School and the Faculty of Science were erected on Dóm Sq., when the Faculty of Arts started using the Central Administrative Office of the Railways in Egyetem Str. and also their Student Hall on Boldogasszony Ave. The four-year-long development project solved the infrastructural problems of the university, so the student body (by 1932 there were 2,163 students), the holdings of the university library, and the scientific quality of the education all increased dynamically. An interesting fact

about the constructions on Dóm Sq. is that only two sides of the square were taken up by university buildings, while the buildings of the Csanád Diocese (the Bishop's Palace, the seminary, college of theology, and the Szent Imre Residence available for the students of the state university, which was financed by the diocese), joined them on the third side.

There were several internationally renowned scholars among the professors of the university: Alfréd Haar and Frigyes Riesz, mathematicians, Zoltán Bay, physicist, Miklós Jancsó Jr., pharmacist, Dezső Miskolczy, neurologist, László Buza, jurist, Sándor Sík, literary critic, Antal Horger and Gedeon Mészöly, linguists, and Elemér Mályusz and József Deér, historians. The academic staff was instrumental in the foundation of several cultural journals and scholarly associations, e. g. the Association of the Friends of the Ferenc József Hungarian Royal University or the Szeged Research Board of the Hungarian Great Plains. The highest scholarly honor was given to Albert Szent-Györgyi, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1937 for the description of the processes of cell oxidation and his work in connection with vitamin C. Between 1930 and 1945, Albert Szent-Györgyi conducted his research in Szeged and it was here that he managed to extract large amounts of vitamin C from paprika produced in Szeged. The scientific achievements of the university were to the practical benefit of the economic life of Szeged and the Southern Great Plains region, e.g. the export of fruit and paprika increased. That is why the city could repay the loans taken out to finance the university constructions despite the economic depression.

In 1928 the State Teacher Training College, moved to Szeged from Budapest. Students followed courses in one of their majors at the university and the board of directors of the college included professors of the college and the university, too. By 1929 an impressive primary school was built near the main building of the college to provide a training facility for the future teachers. In 1938 yet another training program started in Újszeged, the Eastern part of Szeged: a Nurses' and Health Visitors' Institute commenced its operations led by the director of the Institute of Public Health. Several professors of the Medical School also gave lectures here and the students received their practical training in the clinical buildings. So in the course of one single decade, two higher education facilities enlarged the educational network of the city.

In 1940, Northern Transylvania was reassigned to Hungary so the Hungarian university could reopen its doors in Cluj. The Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of the Ferenc József University and 12 professors and many students from the other faculties returned to Cluj from Szeged. The majority of the pro-

fessors and students, however, remained in Szeged and continued their work at the Horthy Miklós University. The temporary suspension of the Faculty of Law in Szeged resulted in a dramatic decrease in the size of the student body (in 1939 it consisted of 1,669 students while in 1940, 1,100 students), but, in spite of the war, in the next couple of years, the number of students enrolled increased to 1,344. In the last years of the war, many students were on military duty.

A decade of reconstruction after the war

On October 2, 1944, as news of the Soviet Army approaching reached the city, the university was evacuated and some of the professors, students, and laboratory equipment were transported to Budapest, Sopron, and Halle (Germany). Only six professors stayed in Szeged. On October 11, 1944, the city was taken by the Soviet Army and teaching resumed in November. The university suffered serious blows during the war: bombs destroyed the Department of Pediatrics, and the buildings of the Teacher Training College, the Faculty of Arts and the Zrínyi Miklós Residence were used as military hospitals. The university took the name “University of Szeged” in the spring of 1945, but reconstruction works and the reclaiming of the different locations didn’t show much progress. At the end of the war, the Faculty of Law was forced to leave Cluj and they continued working in Szeged in 1945. This reinstated the traditional university structure of four faculties.

In 1947, following contemporary Soviet models, the Teacher Training College, was reorganized and was replaced by a College of Pedagogy which offered degrees for both primary and secondary school teachers.

In 1948, as a result of political pressure, Russian language, Marxism-Leninism and Military studies were introduced as mandatory subjects, and, in 1949, Academic Records Registry, party chapters and political youth organizations were set up to control students and the academic staff. The centuries-long system of university autonomy was abolished as deans and rectors were appointed by state officials (up until 1989), and the departments of Marxism-Leninism and Military Studies were independently managed. Freedom of studies was also voided because nationally controlled central curricula, requirements, lesson plans, and examination materials were distributed and centrally surveyed. In 1951, the previously used system of academic ranks (doctorate, professorship, habilitation, etc.) was revoked and universities were stripped off of their right to confer academic titles. Also in 1951, the Medical School was transformed into an independent university, the Medical University of Szeged.

The number of students increased (by 1951 there were 2,058 students), but admissions and promotions were decided based on ancestry or other political reasons. The number of possible majors decreased and at the Faculty of Arts, upon political pressure, the departments of modern languages (for a short period of time even Latin and Ancient Greek) ceased to exist, therefore, for more than a decade, only Hungarian, History or Russian teachers were trained at the Faculty.

In this period, the university and the college could grow thanks to the buildings taken from the Church (in 1948, the Szent Imre Residence became a medical dormitory; in 1951, a Dentistry Clinic opened up in the building of the Tóth-Resort; in 1951, the building of the Court of Appeals on Tisza Lajos Blvd. was given to the Faculty of Law; in 1953, the Faculty of Science moved in the Piarist Secondary School on Aradi vértanúk Sq.; and in 1963, the convent of the School Sisters of Notre Dame (also known as Karolina Secondary School) was occupied by the College of Pedagogy). One significant construction work benefited the university apart from the ones mentioned above: the so called Béke-building was inaugurated in 1952, so the buildings on Dóm Sq. and the former Piarist Secondary School were finally joined together.

On October 16, 1956, the youth of the university of Szeged sparked a revolt against the dictatorship and they formed the Association of Hungarian University and College Students, a society independent of political parties. Young people in Szeged sent delegations to other cities: Pécs, Eger, Budapest, Debrecen, Veszprém, Miskolc, Sopron and Győr so the university students of Szeged served as a considerable catalyst in the process of civil dissatisfaction in the country, but university and college students in Szeged did not take part in any armed conflicts after October 23 and they did not resort to violence. In 1957, however, strict disciplinary hearings were conducted against students and professors. Of these latter 25 were let go, 2 forced to start retirement, and 26 demoted. 64 of the students left the country fearing repercussions, 29 were excluded from all further higher education and 41 received serious reprimand. The academic staff and the students undergoing legal procedures were sentenced to a total of 24 and 47 years of imprisonment, respectively.

Period of regular development (1957–1999)

In 1957, the Faculty of Pharmacy started its independent life after 85 years of teaching and training pharmacists from the beginnings of the history of the university, so the Medical University of Szeged continued working with

two faculties. In the 1960s and 1970s, several student residences were established (e.g. Teleki Blanka Residence, Móra Ferenc Residence, Herman Ottó Residence, Semmelweis Ignác Residence, Jancsó Miklós Sr. Residence, Béke Street Residence, Apáthy István Residence, Károlyi Mihály Residence, Öthalmi Student Homes). Also, new majors and specializations made the training offer of the universities and colleges of Szeged larger. The Faculty of Arts underwent to most visible boom as there the number of departments, staff members, students and majors all increased quite visibly, while, at the same time, the academic level also rose. In Hungary, László Kalmár at the Faculty of Science was the first to introduce a new course on computer science with his “Programming of automated computers” in 1957 in Szeged. It was the first step towards the internationally renowned research and training program in computer programming in Szeged. It now offers education in different specializations and on different levels, and maintains successful cooperation with the business sector. In 1962, at the Medical University of Szeged, a separate degree course was started for dentistry, which eventually became a separate faculty in 2007. In 1985, an English-language program was set up, in 1987, a Hungarian-English medical translation specialization was launched, and in 1999, a German-language medical training program began in cooperation with the Faculty of General Medicine of the Semmelweis University in Budapest.

In 1962, the University of Szeged, comprising of the Faculties of Arts, Science and Law and Political Sciences assumed the name of the former student, the poet Attila József. In 1973, to celebrate the centenary of its foundation in Budapest, the College of Pedagogy of Szeged was renamed after Gyula Juhász. In 1987, the Medical University of Szeged also changed its name: it chose its former professor, the Nobel laureate Albert Szent-Györgyi as a model to follow by its staff and students.

In this period a number of new institutions of higher education started their work in the city. In 1961, a professional agricultural school opened its gates which became a college in 1970 and it started its first year with more than 600 students. From 1986 on, it operated as the Faculty of Food Science of the University of Horticultural and Food Sciences in Budapest. In 1966, the Town School of Music was renamed and reopened as the Szeged chapter of the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music and the College of Music Teacher Training. Professional development reached such a pace that by 1983, it offered a university level education. In 1972, the Agricultural Technical School of Hódmezővásárhely (a town near Szeged) which had been functioning since 1961, continued its operations as the Faculty of Animal Husbandry of the Col-

lege of Food Sciences. Finally, in 1973, the School of Nurses and Health Visitors also became a college, and, from 1989 on, it operates as a Faculty within the Medical University of Szeged. Originally it offered training for nurses and health visitors, but now physical therapists and social workers also study here.

The Regional Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences had been offering excellent possibilities of scientific cooperation since 1961. The Szeged chapter works in the traditional scientific fields up to this day. As for sciences, the Biological Research Center of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (founded in 1973) is a major source of possibilities of cooperation of great importance. Thanks to this, in the last decades, research in the fields of sciences (mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and computer science) at our university has become a dynamically developing and internationally renowned field.

By 1989, the year of the change of regime, our university had become colorful and quite large, exceeding all figures from before with 4,793 students in 1990, and with an increasing number of majors and specializations of growing reputation. The major breakthrough came in the 1990s, when not only did the number of students rise dynamically but also the university came into possession of new buildings.

The era of the University of Szeged (2000–2014)

The integration of 2000 created the University of Szeged, uniting higher education institutes in Szeged. Today it operates 12 faculties (Faculties of Law and Political Sciences, General Medicine, Arts, Health Sciences and Social Studies, Dentistry, Economics and Business Administration, Pharmacy, Engineering, Agriculture, Science and Informatics, Music and the Juhász Gyula Faculty of Education).

In 2004, the library system of the university was also integrated with the creation of a new library operating in the newly built modern József Attila Study and Information Center. The integrated university library, Klebelsberg Library since 2011, is the heart of the university as it offers access to a collection of 1.5 million volumes, to professional library services and to computer labs.

In 2006, following European recommendations, our university transformed the majority of its degree programs (with the exception of Medicine, Pharmaceuticals, and Law) into the so called Bologna system offering training in three cycles (on Bachelor's, Master's and Ph.D. levels).

In 2012, the University of Szeged celebrated its former professor on the 75th anniversary of Albert Szent-Györgyi's receiving the Nobel prize, by inviting nine Nobel laureates to participate in an extraordinary international scientific convention and by organizing diverse programs during the course of the whole year.

In the Spring of 2014, the newly refurbished building of the Faculty of Sciences and Informatics was inaugurated. It houses the Dean's Office and various departments of mathematics. One of the inaugural speeches was delivered by László Lovász, mathematician, the president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, who was a senior associate professor and head of department between 1975 and 1982 at the university of Szeged. The new 265 bed general clinical building was also finished in 2014.

The Extreme Light Infrastructure Attosecond Light Pulse Source (ELI-ALPS) scientific research facility is expected not only to provide infrastructure for cutting-edge high-speed experiments in physics, but also in biology, medicine and materials sciences. There is already a massive collaboration between the ELI and the University of Szeged which will, hopefully, reach an even larger scale.

At the moment, 30,000 students (among them more than 1,000 foreign) study at 12 faculties with the option of choosing from 88 Bachelor's, 113 Master's and 4 Combined degree programs. There are also 59 professional post-graduate and complementary training programs and 19 doctoral schools to support the work of the most excellent ones. The highest level education and scientific research is the responsibility of the academic staff of 2,149 people, 21 of whom are members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 114 are D.Sc. and 643 are Ph.D.-holders.